(b) if so, whether Government propose to increase the coverage area;

(c) whether Government also propose to construct new telephone exchanges in rural areas; and

(d) the steps taken to provide coverage of all towns and cities for cell phones in Andhra Pradesh?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) to (d)The Government has issued licences for operation of basic telephone services to two private operators apart from Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) in Andhra Pradesh. All operators are free to deploy any technology including Wireless in Local Loop (WLL) for provision of the services to their customers and offer various facilities. According to the information available, such systems have already been installed in 194 Short Distance Charging Areas (SDCAs) which are typically tehsils. As reported by licences, the service is available at present in 91 SDCAs to the consumers including 44 rural SDCAs. The installed systems in balance SDCAs will be commissioned after successful completion of interconnection test. Each operators is free to decide its own criteria to construct new telephone exchanges in rural areas. Further, the roll out obligations of cellular operators stipulates coverage of 50% district headquarters or any town in that district in lieu of within 3 years of signing of the agreement. The Cellular Operators are free to take their own commercial decisions to provide coverage in all towns and cities.

Basic telecom operators' rural telephony obligation

1204. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the deadline for the basic telecom operators to fulfil their rural telephony obligations has been extended;

(b) whether these operators during the last six years have extended their presence only to a minimal 7 per cent of the number of villages that they were contractually bound to connect;

(c) whether all telecom operators have been contributing 5 per cent of their revenue for the last three years for the village telecom project under the Universal Service Fund (USF) meant to finance unremunerative networks; and

(d) if so, the current accumulations in the USF?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (A) The private basic service operators have been asked to fulfil their rural telephony obligations by the end of 2003 excluding the categories of villages identified as depopulated villages, villages with population less then 100, Nexalite or insurgency villages and villages to be covered by satellite media in the first phase.

(b) According to the information available, these operators have provided 11632 VPTs as on 30th June, 2003. These include 831 VPTs provided in Punjab as a replacement of MARR VPTs.

(c) Universal Service Fund has not been established so far.

(d) Does not arise in view of (c) above.

Rolling back of call charges by BSNL/MTNL

1205. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether BSNL and MTNL have rolled back the call charges from land line phones to mobile cell phones the monthly rent and other tariff rates after May 1, this year when the rates were abruptly raised; and

(b) if so, the details of the revision in rates and the reasons impelling such revision?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ASHOK PRADHAN): (a) No Sir. There were no abrupt increase of rates.

In the tariff packages of BSNL and MTNL effective from May, 2003, there was no proposal to increase the monthly rental. Certain adjustments/ rationalization of call charges and pulse rates from land line phones to cellular phones were proposed.